

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN  
CHAIRMAN, SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION  
AVIATION SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING  
ON ATC MODERNIZATION  
FEBRUARY 26, 1998

- Thank you, Chairman Gorton. I appreciate your holding this hearing on air traffic control (ATC) modernization. Ensuring the highest levels of aviation safety and upgrading the nation's ATC system are two of the most important tasks currently facing the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).
- Last year, the White House Commission on Aviation Safety and Security recommended accelerating the pace of ATC modernization. Despite the fact that the commission was chaired by the vice president, the administration does not seem to have followed through with a serious commitment of resources to speed up the modernization effort. Although Facilities and Equipment funding is up under the president's proposal, funds dedicated to the procurement and modernization of ATC facilities and equipment would be increased by only \$68 million. Even with the increase, the total funding in this area still would not match the level for FY 1997.
- While it is important to keep the overall federal budget within the bounds of the balanced budget agreement, the president's recent funding proposal for the FAA seems to be inadequate to meet the investment required for modernization. In addition, the agency faces a very serious potential threat associated with the Year 2000 problem. According to an analysis by the DOT Inspector General, it appears that the Administration may not have requested enough money to address the Year 2000 problem at the FAA.
- I don't believe it is any secret that the OMB can be a major problem when it comes to funding requests for the FAA. I am fairly certain that requests made by the agency itself within the Administration are more likely to reflect its true requirements. During last year's confirmation hearings, Administrator Garvey assured our committee that she would be "a very strong and vocal presence within the Administration to articulate clearly and forcefully what the needs are." Unfortunately, her pleas seem to have fallen on deaf ears at OMB.
- I realize it is very difficult for someone in her position to be at odds publicly with other parts of the executive branch, but the responsibilities of the FAA are far too important for Congress not to have a clear understanding of what is needed. Apart from her advocacy within the Administration, I hope that the Administrator

will give us her commitment to be a candid and honest broker in this regard so that Congress can do everything within its power to ensure critical aviation needs are being met.

- If the FAA fails to make serious progress in its modernization work, whether due to poor management or lack of adequate resources, the potential impact on the economy could be dramatic. As pointed out by the National Civil Aviation Review Commission, the anticipated growth in air traffic will soon put a tremendous strain on the capacity of the system, causing it to become gridlocked. We simply must not let this happen.
- Finally, I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today to provide us with their perspectives on this vital issue. I look forward to hearing what each of you has to say.